



Almagul Menlibayeva. *Jihad*, Still from video, 2004

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **I Dream of the Stans: New Central Asian Video**

Featuring recent work by Vyacheslav Akhunov, Rahraw Omarzad, Almagul Menlibayeva, Jamshed Khalilov, Gulnara Kasmalieva & Muratbek Djumaliev, Said Atabekov, and Julia Tikhonova & Rustam Khalfin

**Co-curated by Leeza Ahmady, Murat Orozobekov, and Edward Winkleman**

March 20 - April 26, 2008

**Opening Reception: Thurs, March 20, 6-8 pm**

**Gallery Hours: Tues - Sat, 11 6 pm**

In conjunction with Asian Contemporary Art Week 2008, Winkleman Gallery is extremely pleased to present *I Dream of the Stans*, an exhibition of new video by leading contemporary artists in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Co-curated by independent curator Leeza Ahmady, Murat Orozobekov, and Edward Winkleman, the exhibition surveys the range of powerful new works emerging from this often overlooked region of the world. Since the incredible critical acclaim that greeted the first Central Asian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2005, contemporary artists from Afghanistan and the former Soviet Republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan have drawn an increasing amount of attention from Western curators, museums and galleries. Most of the newfound attention centers on the remarkably strong single- and multi-channel video works produced in the region, a fact often attributed to the region's centuries-old traditions of storytelling, street theater, and weaving. *I Dream of the Stans* brings together works by seven of the area's most important artists (and teams) including **Vyacheslav Akhunov, Rahraw Omarzad, Almagul Menlibayeva, Jamshed Khalilov, Gulnara Kasmalieva & Muratbek Djumaliev, Said Atabekov, and Julia Tikhonova & Rustam Khalfin.**

Known for elaborate multi-channel video installations (including a 5-channel piece recently commissioned by the Art Institute of Chicago), the husband-wife team **Muratbek Djumaliev & Gulnara Kasmalieva** (Kyrgyzstan) present their 2006 single-channel piece "Something About Contemporary Nomadism," in which a steady stream of seemingly bored airline passengers passing through security blithely submit to what would be seen as highly invasive personal searches in other settings. Guards with rubber gloves pat them down, touching their inner legs and backs and chests, while the passengers seem to hardly notice.

In **Vyacheslav Akhunov's** (Uzbekistan) video "Cleaner" the artist is seen meticulously cleaning the surfaces of various British national monuments in London with his toothbrush. Akhunov was well-known by his peers as the "official anti-official artist" during the Soviet era, but now continues to tackle ideas of cultural superiority, be it intellectual, spiritual or political. In his videos, the subjects often repeat certain actions or gestures in a kind of circular pattern; from bottom to top, one point to another, or just going round and about - all reminiscent of various forms of Sufi meditations. In "Cleaner" Akhunov reminds us that perhaps our sacredly guarded ideas about culture and its production needs some form of cleansing. He is keen on broadening defined notions and unburdening established authorities by exploring conflicts, which are derivative of culture that in itself is subjective.

**Rustam Khalfin** (born in Uzbekistan and resident of Kazakhstan), as follower of Russian historical avant-garde and both teacher and theorist of trends in contemporary art and culture, has played an integral role in training younger artists. In his collaboration video with **Julia Tikhonova**, entitled “Northern Barbarians, Part II: Love Races,” a young couple is making love, nude on horseback, while riding across some desolate woods. Inspired by two series of watercolors from the 18th and 19th centuries (found in the book of “Chinese Eros”) the love scenes are re-interpreted. The term “Northern Barbarians” is a reference the name the ancient Chinese called the wild wanderers they were grateful to have the Great Wall of China separate them from. The video is the reconstruction of an ancient way of making love in a region highly connected to its nomadic past and spirit. Considered a masterpiece, the work exemplifies how Khalfin’s painterly mind is matched by his conceptual vigor for contextual criticism.

Two internationally exhibiting artists also from Kazakhstan, **Almagul Menlibayeva** and **Said Atabakov**, address the processes for change and reform in Central Asia with a focus on Asian continental ties and mentality. **Said Atabakov** is a founding member of the influential collaborative “Kizil Traktor” (Red Tractor). In his video “Neon Paradise,” the artist is dressed in his signature dervish outfit made of an odd mixture of absurd objects, materials and props, including an old Soviet-military jug for water. He is seen sitting like an aberration kneeling in a kind of a prayer position repeatedly bowing his head down towards an automatic double glass door that continues to open and shut as he moves. It is not clear whether the doors open into a corporate building, modern super market, or university. What is clear is that in this noble open-ended manner the artist is deconstructing contemporary realities such as economic and environmental decadence and other technologically driven mass global deliriums.

**Almagul Menlibayeva** is known as an experimental artist working simultaneously in a variety of media such as painting, performances, installations and videos. Her gorgeously landscaped and peopled videos translate the various dimensions of what she wishes to express about beauty, decor, ritual and spiritual practices. Her primary concern with women and their role in pre-Soviet, pre-Islamic, and even shamanistic and dervish origins is exemplified in her video “Jihad.”

**Rahraw Omarzad**, an artist and professor at Kabul University, established the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (CCAA). He is the conceptual author of the video work “Opening” in collaboration with his students and members of CCAA. Through CCAA, Omarzad has been actively working with young artists in an effort to foster their sense of independence and individuality. Re-education is therefore a pressing; not only in re-thinking art and its making but in rendering visible the various truths that are buried beneath the piles of media-manufactured issues facing Afghanistan. In this video, a dark screen and a loud consistent banging sound slowly opens to a woman’s sparkling eyes under her “Chadori”. Someone from the outside cuts open a layer of fabric in front of the veiled women, but instead of seeking to come out or to cut off her veil with the scissors, she opts to embroider a beautiful and colorful floral design around the opening with her sensually jeweled and painted hands. The work is a poetic gesture towards woman’s creative role in the world as assigned to her by nature and how the subjects of freedom and limitation are relative to internal attitudes, regardless of how dire the external façade.

**Jamshed Khalilov** represented Tajikistan at the Central Asian Pavilion in Venice in 2007. In his charming piece “Bus Stop,” each image in a series of photographs of the often highly decorated structures providing shelter for commuters throughout Central Asian countries seems to pause momentarily and then whisk off to the side, as if mimicking the stop-and-start motions of a bus along its route. Often blending Soviet motifs with more ancient and/or Islamic architectural themes and patterns, each of the bus stops is a unique artistic statement even as it serves a public purpose. Sometimes fantastical (one is shaped like the traditional hat worn by natives), sometimes simply beautiful, these now nostalgic structures stand out as oases of expression along the otherwise often desolate roads they punctuate.

For more information, please contact Leeza Ahmady at [info@ahmadyarts.com](mailto:info@ahmadyarts.com)

**This Exhibition was highlighted as part of Asian Contemporary Art Week**

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